

The State of Utah chooses "The Alternative Route"



Hands-on CNG fueling seminar in Utah.

The Utah Division of Fleet Operations (DFO) has worked diligently in its efforts to purchase the number of Alternative Fuel Vehicles (AFV) mandated by the Environmental Protection Act (EPACT) and the Clean Air Act. At one point, the state fleet had more than the required number of AFVs—including compressed natural gas (CNG) bi-fuel Ford Contours and Oldsmobile Achieves, dedicated Honda Civics, and two ultra low emission vehicles (a Toyota Prius and a Honda Insight). However, data collected through DFO's fleet tracking program showed that CNG bi-fuel vehicles were being run solely on unleaded gasoline. Steve Saltzgiver, DFO Director, who is committed to the use of alternative fuels due to the pollution problem in the Salt Lake Valley, found the lack of CNG use by state employees unacceptable. He began looking for a solution to the low CNG utilization.

Accompanied by several members of his staff, Saltzgiver attended a CNG fuel seminar called "Train the Trainer." This program was started when Lisa Yoder, Alternative Fuels and Transportation Program Manager from the Utah Office of Energy noticed that the one bi-fuel vehicle assigned to her department was not being run on CNG. She was told that no one in the office knew how to fill the vehicle and it seemed that no one really wanted to learn. Working with the Salt Lake Chapter of the Clean Cities Coalition, the Questar Fuel

Company, and the DFO Fuel Network Manager, Yoder put together a four-hour seminar designed to educate one or two people in an office who would then share the information with their co-workers.

Saltzgiver and his group found that while the program offered information about the chemical make-up of CNG and the importance of using this fuel, it did not address the concerns voiced by state employees who drive the vehicles: how to fuel the vehicle and is the vehicle safe? Saltzgiver assigned me, the division technical writer, the task of creating an educational seminar for state employees that would encourage the use of CNG within the state fleet. Yoder and I met while the DFO seminar was in the planning stages. We decided that our combined efforts would be the answer we were both looking for.

The result was a traveling 1.5-hour seminar named "The Alternative Route," which made its premiere in January 2001. The seminar consists of a short welcome period followed by a five-minute CD presentation created by DFO. It explains the history behind EPACT and the Clean Air Act, as well as the federal mandates requiring large fleets to purchase AFVs. Step-by-step fueling instructions are also included in the presentation, after which a 10-minute safety video provided by the Questar Fuel Company, called "Severe Abuse Test," is shown. This video calms the safety fears of

the driver through laughter. The video portrays CNG cars being dropped from 90 feet in the air and CNG tanks being lit on fire, placed on an exploding pile of dynamite, and shot with an AK-47 assault rifle.

Once the "how to" and safety issues are answered, the program moves into a question and answer period designed to encourage CNG use. Handouts with the locations of all the CNG fueling stations throughout the State of Utah are provided, along with information about the \$0.20 per gallon rebate offered by DFO. (Agencies choosing to fuel with CNG are eligible for the rebate.) The program also presents information about incentives available to people who purchase AFVs and what types of vehicles are available for purchase by the general public. During this time, a fueling coupler is passed around the audience so that they can get a feel for the equipment and how it works prior to the "hands-on" field trip.

Once all of the questions are answered, everyone travels in CNG vehicles to a nearby fueling station where everyone is required to fuel the vehicle. The field trip is designed to increase the audience's comfort level in fueling a CNG vehicle alone.

Response to the presentation has been favorable, with high marks given on the seminar evaluation sheets. The program has been nominated for the 2001 Clean Air Excellence Award sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The program has been presented seven times throughout the state, to state agencies, federal agencies, and the civilian staff at Hill Air Force Base. Local governments have voiced interest in the program due to the 8 percent increase in CNG usage during the past year.

People who have attended the program state that they wished they had known it was so easy to fuel a CNG vehicle. Some didn't even know that their agency had been assigned a CNG vehicle or that they had driven one. Yoder and Taylor plan a proactive approach to the training during the next vehicle replacement cycle. Agencies slated to receive CNG vehicles will be contacted prior to delivery and the training seminar scheduled soon after the vehicle has arrived. ♦

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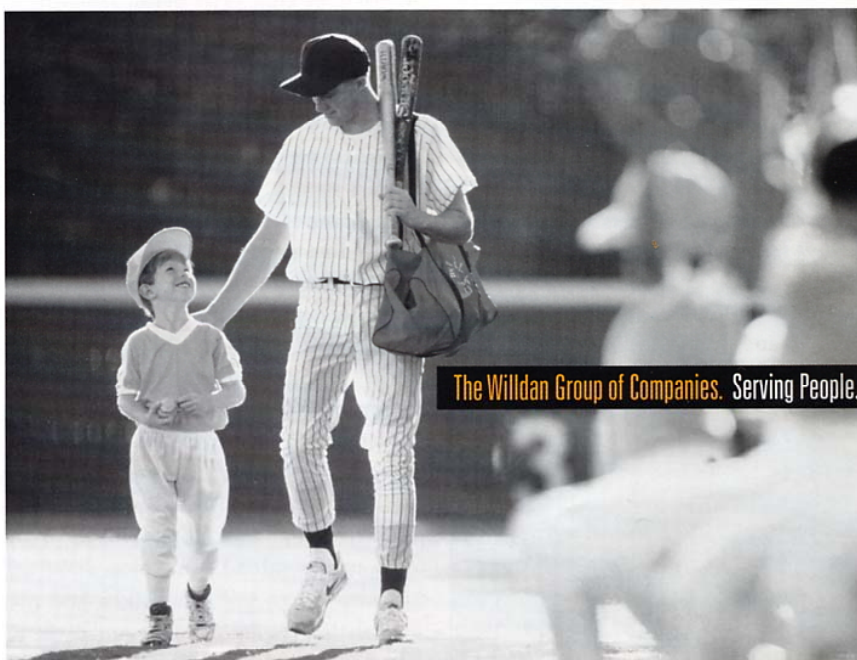
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